

C. SSO 3: Informed citizens' groups effectively contribute to more responsive Government (*Civil Society*)

The hallmark of a democratic society is the freedom of individuals to associate with like-minded individuals, express views publicly, openly debate public policy, petition government, and undertake collaborative action. "Civil society" is the term used to describe organizations (e.g., NGOs, trade unions, business associations, religious institutions, and independent media) that allow for this type of participation. The Center's priorities in the civil society area include developing an enabling environment to allow civil society organizations (CSOs) to operate effectively; enhancing citizen participation in public policy formation and oversight; providing capacity-building assistance to CSOs; increasing the free flow of information through the media; and strengthening democratic political cultures.

While recognizing the broad range of contributions of civil society in a democracy, the activities in this area focus on the political actions of civil society, particularly enhancing advocacy and public debate on political issues. It is through the advocacy efforts of NGOs that people are given a voice in promulgating public policy. Media support is provided to stimulate public awareness as a basis for this advocacy. Labor is also a key component in civil society; the Center supports free and independent trade unions as a major partner seeking basic rights and freedoms. The Center supports civil society programming through field support, technical leadership, and a large labor grant with the American Center for International Labor Solidarity (Solidarity Center).

1. Center Involvement in U.S. Foreign Policy Priorities

The Center continued to be involved in a number of labor issues of foreign policy interest. A revitalized relationship with the Department of Labor (DOL) is being nurtured to fully achieve a coordinated response to these issues. Most recently, a DOL career employee was assigned to G/DG on detail to replace a long-term RSSA assignment. The Center is negotiating a new RSSA as the basis for other DOL staff assignments to the Agency.

Late in 1998, in response to a request from the National Economic Council at the White House, G/DG teamed with G/HCD and LAC/RSD to outline a global program to assist in the elimination of abusive child labor through an education initiative. The proposal was well received and a request for \$10 million is included in the Administration's FY 2000 request to the Congress for funding.

In addition, G/DG is supporting a complementary effort to that of the White House Voluntary Apparel Industry Partnership as it seeks to bring to public attention the working conditions under which many products are made overseas for sale by U.S. companies in U.S. markets. The partnership is targeting the elimination of sweatshops. To encourage corporate-union partnerships outside the apparel industry, the Center is funding (with DRL and LAC Bureau) a small pilot program to develop the capacity of CSOs in two countries to monitor compliance with codes of conduct adopted voluntarily by two U.S. companies. The pilot program will be initiated in FY 1999 with the award of a grant to the International Labor Rights Fund.

2. Sharing Technical Expertise and Lessons Learned

G/DG continues to focus attention on strengthening the role of civil society in pressing for economic reforms. A comparative study of approaches and lessons learned on representing civil society in economic policy formation is underway. The Center participated in the initial strategy design for the AERA Initiative, focusing on strengthening CSOs to press for reform and oversight of recovery initiatives.

G/DG completed an impact assessment of USAID media investments in Central America, the report of which constituted the basis for a strategic framework for donor media investments. The draft framework was featured in a Center-sponsored workshop on the “Role of Media in Democracy,” which included the participation of NGOs and donors supporting media development. G/DG was represented in the founding of the Bellagio media network, which includes the membership of media policy and advocacy institutes worldwide and representatives from Asia, Belarus, China, Russia, and the Latin American and Southern African regions. The network provides technical assistance and support for entities seeking to improve the operation of media laws, regulations, and policies in transition societies.

The Center participated in the founding of the International Working Group on NGO Capacity Building, which features representation of donors and northern and southern NGOs. The network identifies the priority needs of southern NGOs and coordinates assistance strategies to meet these needs.

In FY 1998, G/DG completed an interim report that assesses the impact of USAID in civic education activities in the **Dominican Republic** and **Poland**. The preliminary results should influence this rapidly-growing area of USAID support, since they indicate USAID civic education programs should be coupled with opportunities for participants to actively engage in social and political activities. The Center is studying the impact of civic education in **South Africa** to validate these initial findings.

G/DG staff recently participated in ENI's “Lessons in Transition” study of USAID NGO assistance. Specifically, the Center contributed members to teams sent to Poland, Russia, and Ukraine to assess what types of NGO assistance have been most effective, and where USAID assistance should be targeted in the future. The Center will also assist in the dissemination of a subsequent final report to DG officers worldwide.

3. Field Support

The Center provided intensive assistance to a number of missions in the design of their DG strategies—many of which have a heavy civil society component. In **Indonesia**, for example, the Center assisted in designing a strategy to strengthen the contributions of civil society in the current democratic transition. In particular, the program has been expanded to include support for CSOs engaged in interfaith/interethnic dialogue and reconciliation, support for a newly emerging free and independent labor movement, and assistance in developing a broader coalition of CSOs advocating democratic reforms.

The Center is working closely with the Agency Task Force and the U.S. Embassy to support civil society participation in the **DROC's** political transition process. The USG's overall goal of supporting a peaceful democratic transition in this country has been particularly challenging, as initial diplomatic efforts to engage the government in a participatory transition process produced only limited results. Congressional prohibitions on direct assistance to the government together with political sensitivities have further limited programmatic options. In response to this challenging environment, the Center and its partners established a resource center in Kinshasa, whose performance has exceeded Center expectations. Specifically, the Center provided critical support to CSOs through strategic planning and education workshops and information on the evolving transition process. Its existence has also proven to be a mainstay of U.S.-Congolesse relations. For example, when the United States was forced to evacuate its embassy, the resource center remained open, making use of its flexibility as an NGO funded by the USG. This activity (highly praised by the U.S. ambassador, State, and the NSC), analyzes the DROC's electoral and transition process.

The Center assisted the USAID mission in **Kenya** in updating its DG strategy, which continues to place primary emphasis on strengthening civil society advocacy for political liberalization and basic constitutional reform. The new strategy seeks to deepen the outreach of civil society to rural areas and cultivate potential reformist pressures emanating within parliament and other institutions of governance.

The Center's civil society IQCs with World Learning and MSI provided rapid-response technical expertise to support civil society programs of missions and regional bureaus. Linkages with the ENI region were strengthened when the Center's IQC on civil society was accessed for technical expertise in evaluating the DemNet project, a major regional civil society program for the East European region. Technical services were provided to Egyptian NGOs to strengthen their volunteer management practices. Long-term resident advisors continued to assist the growth of civil society in Angola and Indonesia. Advocacy training programs were initiated for CSOs in El Salvador and Guinea. A training program on fair election coverage for print and electronic journalists was undertaken in El Salvador.

4. Program Management

A major goal of the Agency is strengthening the capacity and role of labor unions to advocate for political and economic reform. In addition to its civil society IQCs, the Center manages a \$45-million, five-year labor grant to the Solidarity Center, which continues to provide assistance to promote the development of free, democratic, and independent trade unions as a fundamental building block for the rights of freedom of association and free speech. In the past year, the Center introduced a number of improvements to the management of the labor program. The Solidarity Center has adopted the Agency's framework for results management and its annual implementation plan is now reviewed by the Agency in the context of the USAID DG strategy. Beyond this, the four regional labor organizations have now been absorbed into the Solidarity Center, ensuring a global approach and improved management structure. For the first time this year, ENI programs will be incorporated into the global grant.

A concerted effort is being made to assure that USAID-funded Solidarity Center programming becomes more consistent with larger Agency objectives in democracy and economic development. As part of this effort, the Center has sponsored a series of workshops on the role of labor in democratic and economic development. The result of these workshops will be the design of DG strategies that feature greater integration of labor in democracy and economic reform efforts.

The following are some of the Center's important results in the labor area:

In **El Salvador**, a legal assistance project provided high quality legal services to the Center's partner unions. Challenges to basic rights that would have gone unaddressed were pushed toward resolution through enforcement of existing law. This result forms a critical part of USAID's strategy to defend and protect basic human rights in El Salvador.

In **India**, as part of a Center-supported program, the South Asian Coalition Against Child Servitude conducted a "schools campaign" centered in the Delhi administrative unit and the states of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Approximately 150 schools and colleges participated in the campaign—a major achievement of which was a reduction of fireworks sales by 40 percent during this season, thus dramatically punishing employers who violate India's child labor laws.

Solidarity Center support for the efforts of **Indonesian** unions to push for the ratification of ILO Convention 87 was instrumental in bringing about a presidential decree of accession as one of the first acts of the new Habibie government. This was fundamental in changing the environment for independent, representative trade unions to function, and supporting freedom of association more generally. Under the new guidelines, independent unions now exist outside of a government-controlled monopoly union. In addition, USAID's labor support in Indonesia brought sufficient visibility that the second political prisoner freed by Habibie was a local partner of the Solidarity Center.

G/DG labor activities in **Nigeria** played a significant role in the democratic transition there. Under a waiver of legal restrictions, Center-supported labor programs were pre-positioned and acted quickly in conjunction with other cooperating partners as voter registrars, election monitors, and observers to permit the conduct of statewide local and national elections.

In **Sri Lanka**, the Center supported the establishment of a trade union women's forum, comprised of female leaders from 17 unions. The forum is the first vehicle established in Sri Lanka through which working class women have been able to address gender equity and parity issues.

In 1998, due to a series of comprehensive capacity-building programs sponsored by the Center, the **Bangladesh** Independent Garment Workers Union Federation increased its affiliated factory-level unions from 15 to 24. Membership increased by 7,600 (4,489 women) to a total of 23,687 (14,729 women) in 1998, a 47 percent increase over 1997. This reaffirmed that, even in an industrial setting, an organization run by women could achieve great gains for its members. Unions also gained the right to sue their employers, resulting in successful attempts by women to receive previously withheld back wages.

5. Expected Focus and Results through 2001

The Center will shortly re-bid its general civil society IQCs. In response to feedback from the field, the IQCs will be improved in the following ways: increased ceiling for longer term IQC activities; revised cost structure that is more cost-effective for missions, making it more user-friendly; and simplified labor categories for management purposes. In order to augment its capacity to respond to rapidly emerging opportunities, the Center plans to incorporate a rapid-response component into its new IQCs. Due to reduced budget outlay, G/DG abandoned a planned global civil society cooperative agreement that would have tapped into the expertise of the NGO community, and allowed USAID to respond to the full range of requests from State for implementation of ESF programs.

Given extensive field support and the management demands of labor, as well as the departure of the Center's labor officer and an experienced RSSA employee, work on a broad framework for the development of civil society strategies was not completed last year. This work will be taken on in earnest in FY 1999.

In addition, as part of a G8 initiative in DG, the Center will soon award a grant to analyze the minimum legal standards for supporting a free and independent media. Results of the analysis, to be completed in 1999, will be translated into Spanish, Russian, and French for worldwide distribution through the Bellagio network. Until the recent budget cutbacks, the Center had contemplated joint donor funding for the network to undertake programs in advocating and providing assistance to countries intent on strengthening laws supportive of a free media.

G/DG will continue to enhance the contributions of its labor program toward broader political and economic development. As part of this effort the Center will sponsor additional workshops in the LAC and ANE regions on the role of labor in development. The workshops will feature the participation of the Solidarity Center, academics, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the World Bank, the ILO, and the Center for International Private Enterprise, among others. The result of these workshops will be the design of DG strategies that feature greater integration of labor in democracy and economic reform efforts.

The Center will complete its analysis of lessons learned about civil society participation in economic reform. G/DG guidance from this analysis will be helpful to missions and other donors seeking to design strategies and forums to encourage constructive dialogue among civil society, the private sector, and government on reform issues.

G/DG will also undertake an additional country study of civic education, focusing on innovative programs, such as the Soros Step-by-Step program, in elementary schools. This Soros activity seems to have successfully instilled democratic values and behaviors in children at an early age. If this is the case, the Center may want to work to incorporate elements of this program into new and existing USAID civic education activities.

Anticipated priority countries for civil society technical analysis and field support have been selected to include both those which have had successful USAID civil society programs and those with the most critical civil society challenges faced by USAID, particularly in countries that are high U.S. foreign policy priorities. Selected countries include Guatemala, Indonesia, Nicaragua, Nigeria, the Philippines, South Africa, and the Ukraine.